

# HOLIDAY POSTCARDS FROM THE STICKLEY MUSEUM COLLECTION



AN EXHIBITION CURATED BY ALICE GLOCK

THE STICKLEY MUSEUM AT CRAFTSMAN FARMS

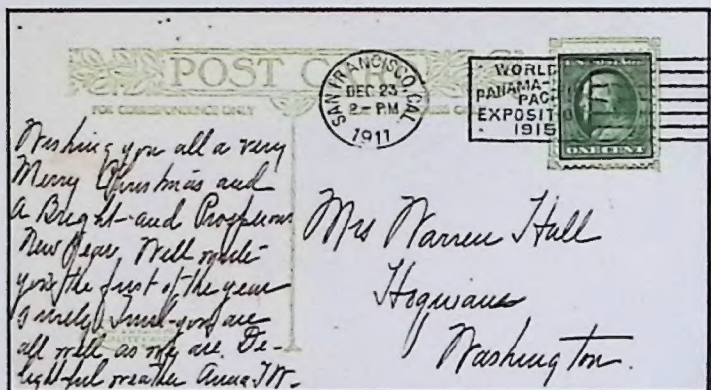
DECEMBER 2009



The postcards in this exhibition are largely contemporaneous with the time that Gustav Stickley and his family lived at Craftsman Farms. The visual imagery in the design of the postcards and the expressed sentiments in their messages of holiday season are a window into the time-period and help us to better understand the social and cultural human experience in America during the early 1900s. The growth of the postcard industry and its widespread popularity represent the time period of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Stickley and his family enjoyed their holiday seasons at home on Craftsman Farms 1910-1916.

### Postcard "Anatomy"

*Fine print and details of postcard backs provide clues to dating and understanding the postcard industry.*



### Divided-Back Cards

The idea of postcards, with their use in tourism, advertising, and as holiday greetings, developed along with the history of the postal system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The "divided-back" feature of all but one of the 42 cards in this collection postdates 1907. After March 1, 1907, the U.S. Government allowed people to write messages on the left side of the postcard back, with space for the address reserved on the right, hence the vertical line down the middle of the back side, separating these two halves. This change, along with the penny postage, (which did not increase until 1952!), was among many factors contributing to the postcard "craze," as both a means of communication and of collecting; it was no longer necessary to mar the front image in order to send a personalized message. As seen in this collection, the choice of a penny stamp was limited to two: either George Washington or Benjamin Franklin.

### Date clues: Postmark and Copyright Dates

The expanding middle class of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century used and enjoyed, collected, and saved, the ever-popular postcards, of which the holiday greeting card was just one type. This collection features a number of cards belonging to Miss Mina Knight of Bennington, Vermont. The fact that the collection remained intact demonstrates how much she treasured the Christmas postcards received in her childhood both from young girl friends and from an aunt and uncle between 1910 and 1918. [See cards 39, 13, 26, 8, 7, 2] Some postcards in the collection bear

canceled stamps with postmark dates, though many do not. Postmarks and copyright dates, when given in tiny type along the edges or corners, help to determine dating. One card Miss Knight received December 1914 was copyrighted in 1912. [8] The postmark establishes the latest possible date of production, and the copyright date, the earliest possible date.

In examining these clues, it can be established that most of the cards in this collection well span the period known as the "Golden Age of Postcards," from 1907, until 1915, when the Great War (WWI) affected the postcard industry.

### Postcard Industry

The Golden Age of postcards was fueled by the industrial revolution and the expanding middle class, which provided a vast market of people who could afford the small price for the pleasure of sharing images and short messages. Entrepreneurs seized this new market opportunity, and the industry in turn accelerated along with technological improvement in photography and printing.

Logos or trademarks, and small type along edges and corners of the postcard – usually on the back but sometimes on the front, can often reveal the names of their publishers, along with copyright marks. Some of the most successful companies producing holiday cards in this collection include the A.M. Davis Company of Boston with the trademark, Quality Cards. [9, 10, 11] P.F. Volland and Company of Chicago, [16-21] is another successful company represented in this collection. German born Volland originally founded the company in 1908 to compete with the established European postcard industry, but ended up expanding the business to include an even more successful art and book publishing as well.

The International Art Publishing Co. [38], The Pink of Perfection [5], and Bon Ton Art Company [13] have established logos; some publishers copyright with their name, such as S. Bergman [7, 8]. Hall (Bros.), appears as an artist signature [32, 33] on the front, which survives today as Hallmark.



Note the signature-style logo "Hall" to the right of the bell. Hall Brothers Inc., became the "Hallmark" card company in 1954.



Even when the logo is not identified, it can be linked to other postcards with the same logo or back side design [35, 36]. For example, even though no fine print or logo identified it, postcard 31 could be identified as a Hall Brothers card because its backside is identical to 32 and 33. These clues pieced together reveal a picture of an industry that accommodated entrepreneurs on all levels,

## HOLIDAY POSTCARDS FROM THE COLLECTION

### Postcards used in this exhibition include the following:

Postcard No. 11  
Gift of Barbara Fuldner  
2007.08

Postcard Nos. 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
Gifts of Barbara Fuldner  
2008.01

Postcard Nos. 2, 7, 8, 13, 25, 26, 37, 39, 42  
Purchase of the Craftsman Farms Foundation, Inc.  
2008.10

Postcard Nos. 3, 9, 10, 15, 21  
Gifts of Barbara Fuldner  
2008.11

Postcard No. 4  
Gift of Barbara Fuldner  
2008.16

Postcard Nos. 1, 6, 12, 13, 24, 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 38, 40, 41  
Gifts of Catherine Carlozzi in Memory of Mary and Henry Bader  
2008.27

*The Stickley Museum at Craftsman Farms gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the donors of whose postcards were used in this exhibition.*

*Special thanks to Alice Glock for her research and essay.*

### THE STICKLEY MUSEUM AT CRAFTSMAN FARMS

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the production of quality cards in Europe was cut off. The Great War marks the end of the Golden Age of postcards.

The International Art Publishing Co. [38], which printed all their cards in Germany, went out of business in 1914. Postcards continued to be printed in the U.S. [12, 24]), though the quality is not as high as the heavily highly and silver trimmed cards most common in the era. The Volland Publishing Co. of New York [6], and The Pink of Perfection of New York [5] were some better established companies that managed to survive the war by printing postcards in the U.S. Hall Brothers cards [31] came in 1954 and, as mentioned above, is still a Hallmark.

### Card Images: Subject matter and style in the Crafts period

The Stickley Museum Christmas exhibition is an invitation to examine, and look at, holiday images that were savored, enjoyed, and served by ordinary everyday people of the same people to whom Gustav Stickley looked through *The Craftsman* magazine. The landscapes and gardens in the postcards of *The Craftsman* reflect the Arts and Crafts style and aesthetic which are also seen in the postcards of the same time period. The poinsettia, described as "the flaming star" and holiday outdoor greenery such as holly, mistletoe, appear in nearly every postcard design.

The exhibition includes numerous examples of postcard designs that evoke a seasonal mood in a winter landscape. One of the main themes of the Arts and Crafts movement is the impact of nature for nurturing and sustaining the human soul. The landscape is rural, often set in the horizon. The structure is a broad gabled-roof bungalow with multiple chimneys, a type of home made popular by Gustav Stickley. Postcard designs featuring women and scenes and in cozy interiors reflect the Arts and Crafts style expressed in many ways in *The Craftsman*, that a progressive society begins in a place where a family life surrounded by nature.

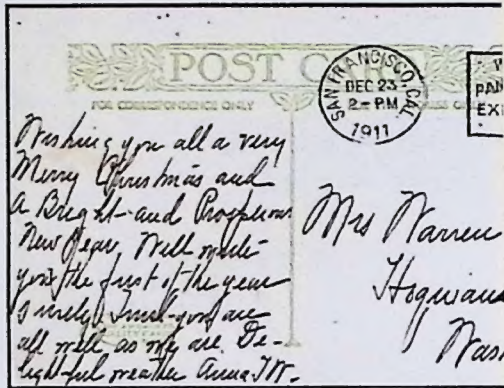
Postcards of the Golden Age accommodate the Arts and Crafts style that echo the experimentation in design in decorative arts during the Arts and Crafts period. Among the landscape images are the pictorial representations, with elaborate detail. These miniature scenes are composed of a landscape [41], or within simple circular or oval shapes that are decorated with holiday motifs [9, 42]. In a contrasting flat, linear style, the postcards are landscapes that are also framed as a scene (who sometimes is also a child or a young woman in the foreground) [1, 2, 21] is looking



The postcards in this exhibition are largely contemporaneous with the time that Gustav Stickley and his family lived at Craftsman Farms. The visual imagery in the design of the postcards and the expressed sentiments in their messages of holiday season are a window into the time-period and help us to better understand the social and cultural human experience in America during the early 1900s. The growth of the postcard industry and its widespread popularity during the time period of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is reflected in the fact that his family enjoyed their holiday seasons at Craftsman Farms 1910-1916.

### Postcard "Anatomy"

*Fine print and details of postcard backs provide dating and understanding the postcard in*



### Divided-Back Cards

The idea of postcards, with their use in advertising, and as holiday greetings, developed with the history of the postal system in the U.S. The "divided-back" feature of all but one in this collection postdates 1907. After the U.S. Government allowed people to write on the left side of the postcard back, with space reserved on the right, hence the vertical line in the middle of the back side, separating these two changes, along with the penny postage, (which increased until 1952!), was among many factors contributing to the postcard "craze," as both a means of communication and of collecting; it was necessary to mark the front image in order to write a personalized message. As seen in this collection, the choice of a penny stamp was limited to two: George Washington or Benjamin Franklin.

### Date clues: Postmark and Copyright Date

The expanding middle class of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century used and enjoyed, collected, and sent popular postcards, of which the holiday genre was just one type. This collection features a number of postcards belonging to Miss Mina Knight of Bennin. The fact that the collection remained intact shows how much she treasured the Christmas postcards in her childhood both from young girl friends and an aunt and uncle between 1910 and 1918. [13, 26, 8, 7, 2] Some postcards in the collection

included canceled stamps with postmark dates, though many do not. Postmarks and copyright dates, when given in tiny type along the edges or corners, help to determine dating. One card Miss Knight received December 1914 was copyrighted in 1912. [8] The postmark establishes the latest possible date of production, and the copyright date, the earliest possible date.



Even when the logo is not identified, it can be linked to other postcards with the same logo or back side design [35, 36]. For example, even though no fine print or logo identified it, postcard 31 could be identified as a Hall Brothers card because its backside is identical to 32 and 33. These clues pieced together reveal a picture of an industry that accommodated entrepreneurs on all levels, including both unnamed and identified publishers, distributors, printers and artists. There was room for hundreds of individuals who tried to stake out a piece of the business, in obscure labels, or unsigned postcards, as well as for big companies that are well-known and survived.

Artists, mostly anonymous, can be recognized in distinctive designs or styles; they could supply work to more than one company. Some, known only by their initials, copyrighted their own images. Only the best known and successful artists signed or initialed their designs. This collection has no signed artists, but H.B. Griggs (also signed as HBG) is recognized in his unique handwritten script. [14, 15]

Unsigned designs in the collection that are very similar in style can be assumed to be by the same unidentified artist, such as a pair of Santa postcards [35, 36], and painterly landscapes [26, 27] which are very similar to signed works of well-known artist John Winch. The P.F. Volland postcards [16-21], with the same unique linear, flat designs that were popular at the end of the Golden Age, were surely created by the same artist's hand. Tiny numbers that appear on edges or corners, front or back could design codes that companies could use to keep track of specific artists or printing clients.

Printing and embossing techniques for manufacturing greeting cards was superior in Europe, especially in Germany where many American companies had their cards printed. Europe was ahead of the U.S. in developing the industry of postcards in the late 19th century and continued a thriving business printing American published and designed cards throughout the Golden Age of postcards. Although only two cards are marked "Made in Germany" [14, 15], it can be assumed that most of the richly colored and elaborately embossed cards of the Golden Age published by American companies before WWI were printed in Germany. [34, 40, plus all the Hall Bros. and Quality Cards]

The Golden Age of postcards, the period this collection best represents, succeeded in the same robust economy of the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century in which Gustav Stickley's enterprise flourished. The abundance of available credit fueled the variety of entrepreneurs involved in the postcard business, allowing for a quantity and quality of production not seen before or since. The overly optimistic economic climate was tempered somewhat by a financial panic in 1907; by protective tariffs in imports beginning in 1909; and by falling prices (affecting the smaller companies most), leading up to the WWI when

the production of quality cards in Europe was cut off. The Great War marks the end of the Golden Age of postcards.

The International Art Publishing Co. [38], which printed all their cards in Germany, went out of business in 1914. Postcards continued to be printed in the U.S. [12, 24]), though the quality is not as high as the heavily highly embossed, gold and silver trimmed cards most common in the Golden Age era. The Volland Publishing Co. of Chicago, the Schlesinger Brothers of New York [6], Gibson Lines [4], and The Pink of Perfection of Cincinnati and NY [5] were some better established companies that managed to survive the war by printing cards of lesser quality in the U.S. Hall Brothers cards [31-33] changed its name in 1954 and, as mentioned above, is known today as Hallmark.

### Christmas Postcard Images: Subject matter and style reflect the Arts and Crafts period

The exhibit from the Stickley Museum Christmas postcard collection is an invitation to examine, and look closely at the holiday images that were savored, enjoyed, collected and preserved by ordinary everyday people of Stickley's time — the same people to whom Gustav Stickley appealed through *The Craftsman* magazine. Articles on winter landscapes and gardens in the December issues of *The Craftsman* reflect the Arts and Crafts period attitudes and aesthetic which are also seen in the postcards of the same time period. The poinsettia, which Stickley described as "the flaming star" and holiday decorating with outdoor greenery such as holly, mistletoe, and pine boughs, appear in nearly every postcard design.

This collection includes numerous examples of postcard images that set the seasonal mood in a winter landscape scene, reflecting one of the main themes of the Arts and Crafts era, the impact of nature for nurturing and improving the human soul. The landscape is rural, often with a little house set in the horizon. The structure is usually a simple, broad gabled-roof bungalow with prominent stone chimneys, a type of home made popular by Gustav Stickley. Postcard designs featuring women and children in snow scenes and in cozy interiors reflect Stickley's belief, expressed in many ways in *The Craftsman* magazine, that a progressive society begins in a home that embraces a family life surrounded by nature.

Christmas postcards of the Golden Age accommodate contrasting artistic styles that echo the experimentation and transition of design in decorative arts during the Arts and Crafts period. Among the landscape images are the traditional realistic representations, with elaborate detail and fine shading. These miniature scenes are composed within a holly wreath [41], or within simple circular or other symmetrical shapes that are decorated with holiday greens. [26, 27, 39, 42] In a contrasting flat, linear style, on the other hand, are landscapes that are also framed as though the viewer (who sometimes is also a child or young woman in the foreground) [1, 2, 21] is looking



through a window or taking in a view [8,11]. Instead of snow banks shaded in a multitude of subtle color for depth and shadow, snow in the new style is pure white, and depth achieved in the viewpoint perspective and composition alone.

The A.M Davis Quality Card landscape [11] is remarkable for its forested winter landscape that could be seen looking from the Stickley's Log House porch. The landscape, in rich greens and gold-brown, is set between symmetrical, linear abstract designs that remind one of the inlays that are characteristic of Stickley's designer Harvey Ellis, as well as of embroidery designs in the Log House. In the same context, also, one can appreciate the extraordinary and unique composition of the landscape view from a hilltop, artfully composed with simple lines and unusual combination of gray and yellow colors. [5, 2]

A similar contrast of styles in holiday postcards of young children and young women (who most frequently sent and received these cards) can be seen between the traditional, more richly decorated composition [3, 34], on the one hand, and those designed in austere, but lively compositions of line and flat, gay colors by the P.F. Volland. [16-21] The original poems, in a plain, angular font characteristic of stylized Arts and Crafts and Art Deco, have coquettish messages that are consistent with the gay and pretty young women composed in an arrangement of lines and unshaded, brightly colored shapes. Volland postcards are unadorned with embossing and metallic colors. The quality of paper was lower, when these were printed during war years.

Another significant group of postcards that well reflect the Arts and Crafts period are designs primarily composed of the printed Christmas message. Initial letters are ornamented or given flourishes. Realistic holiday greens and flowers, or geometric, stylized borders are added in borders. If not plants, bells with ribbons are the most common holiday decorative object.

The gothic-style fonts which dominate in these postcards reflect the influence of William Morris's late career involvement in typography in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As part of the medieval revival that marked British Arts and Crafts movement, Morris redesigned late 15<sup>th</sup> century gothic lettering to make it more readable. His work on new typefaces, reflecting his enduring belief in the unity of beauty and function, was widely imitated. Gustav Stickley, too, shows this influence in the similar fonts used for inspirational messages hammered into the copper and brass fireplace hoods in the Log House.

The variety of gothic-style fonts in this group of postcards demonstrates a similar type of interest and experimentation in typefaces that were both readable and beautiful. Decorative ornamentation and flourishes reveal different artistic tendencies, from traditional Christmas greens and bells motifs [25, 42], to sinuous art nouveau inspired designs [13, 37], to highly stylized Arts

and Crafts borders. [9,10] A result of this focus on letter forms can be seen and appreciated in the carefully crafted shapes of every letter and flourish in the simple "A Merry Christmas" message, which becomes the artful design of this beautiful postcard. [30]

The paucity of Santa subjects in postcards, and lack of religious themed postcards in this collection reflect perspectives of the holiday season conveyed in Gustav Stickley's *Craftsman* magazine; its December issues dwell on the more universal spiritual themes of Christmas. Two of the three Santa images in the collection, painted by the same unidentified artist, appear as a pixie version of the famous Santa image created and popularized by Thomas Nast (in nearby Morristown) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The artist H.B. Griggs, known for his creativity and originality, offers a verse bordered with stylized poinsettias. His hand-written script is striking for its combination of strongly angular and sinuous single-point lines. From his life on Craftsman Farm, Gustav Stickley might have appreciated its holiday sentiment drawn from nature's seasons. [15]

*The Leaves, That Spring can scarce unfold,  
The Autumn Turns To red and gold,  
So may each year That swells your story  
Take on an added touch of glory.*

— Alice Glock

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*Craftsman Farms, owned by the Township of Parsippany-Troy Hills, is the former home of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century designer Gustav Stickley. The 30-acre site has been designated a National Historic Landmark. Restoration is made possible in part, by a Save America's Treasure's grant, administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, and by support from Morris County Preservation Trust Fund, the New Jersey Historic Trust, and individual members. The Craftsman Farms Foundation received an operating support grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State. The Craftsman farms Foundation gratefully acknowledges a grant from the new Jersey Cultural Trust.*



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